



# Harm Reduction Fact Sheet



## Harm Reduction: What is it?

Harm reduction broadly refers to practices that make unsafe activities safer. Most people practice harm reduction techniques, such as wearing a seat belt in a vehicle or using sunscreen on sunny days. This fact sheet will focus on harm reduction with substance use.

## Harm Reduction Refers to:

### **Practice:**

Harm reduction is an evidence-based practice that aims to reduce the negative effects associated with substance misuse. It considers the specific needs of individuals and communities, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all approach. Harm reduction also considers multiple paths to recovery that can lead an individual to a healthier and happier life.

### **Social Justice:**

Harm reduction as a social justice movement is based on the principle that people who use drugs (PWUD) deserve respect, dignity, compassion, and have rights. It aims to combat stigma related to the experiences of PWUD. Harm reduction emphasizes that people experience life differently and cope with their experiences in different ways.

## Key Principles

- ✓ Meet people where they are.
- ✓ Substance misuse is a health issue, not a criminal one.
- ✓ Offer support, not stigma.
- ✓ There's more than one path to recovery.
- ✓ There's no recovery from a fatal overdose.
- ✓ The opposite of addiction is connection.
- ✓ Not everyone is ready to stop using.
- ✓ We can prevent death by overdose.

## Why Practicing Harm Reduction Works

Harm reduction works because it is evidence-based and caters to individuals who need support, focusing on their needs and providing safer ways to live. It offers a nonjudgmental approach to supporting individuals who use substances. It teaches individuals and communities how to prevent death by overdose and equips them with skills to combat overdose.

## Harm Reduction Practices with OUD:

**Syringe Service Programs (SSP):** offer clean syringes and safe disposal of used syringes.

**Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution (OEND):** teaches people the signs of an overdose, how to use naloxone to reverse an overdose, and what to do after reviving someone who has overdosed.

**Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD):** Medications (methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone) help people with OUD control cravings and withdrawal symptoms, thereby stabilizing them.

**Test Kits/Substance Testing:** allow people to test their substances for adulterants such as fentanyl, xylazine, and medetomidine.

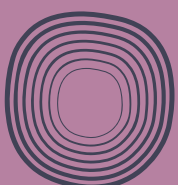
**Blood testing:** helps individuals understand their health needs and whether they may have diseases or viruses, such as HIV or hepatitis.

**First Aid:** provides education on preventing infection and caring for wounds.

**Sexual Health/Condom Distribution:** informing people on safe sex practices and providing them with condoms to allow for safer sex.

## Who Harm Reduction Benefits:

Everyone benefits from harm reduction, from individuals to communities. People who use drugs can be supported physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Families of people who use drugs can be prepared to help their loved ones, whether that is reversing an overdose or supporting their recovery journey. Communities can protect their members and make sure no one is forgotten.



OPIOID LEARNING  
AND RESPONSE  
COLLABORATIVE

responsecollaborative.groupsites.com  
responsecollaborative.com  
olrc@prevention.org

*Funding provided in whole or in part through the Illinois Department of Human Services.*